Standards-Based Accountability Does Not Raise Achievement for Disadvantaged Students

Susan Klein
Standards-Based Accountability Policies

魃 Accountability policies have not been proven to raise student achievement
魃 There is a predictable group of students that are being affected by accountability
魃 There are a variety of ways to implement accountability and “the devil is very much in the details” (Goldhaber, 2)
魃 Fundamental Flaws of No Child Left Behind
Accountability policies have not been proven to raise student achievement
Many policies are based on gains on NAEP in Texas and North Carolina

What is the selection bias of these case studies?

- Initial standings were low and after growth both states were still below average (Grissmer & Flanagan)
- May be more difficult to make gains if the initial standings are high
Concerns over “Teaching to the Test”

- Dallas did not include the TAAS in their high school reward system for because the assessment was not closely linked to the curriculum (Clotfelter & Ladd)

- Washington has Essential Academic Learning Requirements that are not assessed by the WASL because it would be impossible to do so with a large-scale assessment
Reward and Recognition Policies (Clotfelter & Ladd)

- 7th grade passing rates controlling for student demographics
  - Program effects could not be isolated
  - The found growth in Dallas before the incentive program was implemented
  - Found only small effects for black students in 1993, but they disappeared in 1994
“...racial sub-group rules are not having their intended impact” (Kane, Thomas, and Staiger)

- Compared progress in schools a minority sub-group to schools with not quite enough students to have a minority sub-group
  - California vs. Texas
- No discontinuity of scores at the threshold of students which suggests there is no effect
Higher standards, more dropouts?  
(Lillard & DeCicca) 
Examined graduation rates in the 80s and 90s

- Graduation requirements were increased significantly in the mid-eighties
- Dealt with omitted variable bias, endogeneity of policy variable, and estimation of proper variances
- Estimated increases in drop-outs from 1 SD increase in CGRs
  - 26,000 to 65,000 more drop-outs (conservative)
  - 67,000 to 117,000 more drop-outs (liberal)
What effect does standards-based accountability have on student achievement?

- Policies modeled after states which may not be generalizable
- Teaching to tests with questionable validity
- Paying millions in reward and recognition policies that have not been proven effective
- Consequences for not meeting achievement goals in racial sub-groups may not be necessary
- More drop-outs
There is a predictable group of students and schools being affected by standards and accountability
Focusing on students near the cut score

Because standards are generally measured in terms of how many students met the standard, schools may focus on the students that are just below the cut point.

Students far below the cut point will likely be viewed as a lost cause (Goldhaber).
Who is more likely to drop out because of increased standards?

Students that are (Lillard & DeCicca):

- poor
- families are disrupted
- black or Hispanic
- lots of siblings
- parents dropped out of school

In other words, the students we are claiming to help
Schools serving a diverse group of students are more likely to be labeled as “Failing”

- Adequate Yearly Progress looks at groups of 30 students
  - 5 major ethnic groups
  - Low income
  - English Language Learners (ELL)
  - Special Ed

- A school only needs to “Fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress” in 1 category
Schools with larger numbers of subgroups are at a statistical disadvantage

Washington Example: School 2003 Results (By Grade Level)

Adequate Yearly Progress

Made AYP
Did Not Make AYP
Too small to evaluate (N<30)
Schools with larger numbers of subgroups are at a statistical disadvantage

△ More minority than white students attend schools with multiple sub-groups (Kane, Thomas, & Staiger)

Percent of Students in Schools with 1-4+ Numerically Significant Subgroups

- White
- African Amer
- Latino

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>1 subgroup</th>
<th>2 subgroups</th>
<th>3 subgroups</th>
<th>4+ subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Amer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schools serving a diverse group of students are more likely to be labeled as “Failing”

- In North Carolina 30% of black students score above the mean
- Only 2% of black students are in schools that score above the mean
- Only 12% of black students are in schools that score above the 20th percentile
Schools serving a diverse group of students are more likely to be labeled as “Failing”
Schools serving a diverse group of students are more likely to be labeled as “Failing”

Most black and Hispanic students will be in schools that score below the initial bar set by NCLB

54% of American schools have a black or Hispanic sub-group and many of those schools will “Fail to make AYP” (Kane, Thomas, & Staiger)
Who will be affected by standards and accountability?

❖ Standards
  ● Students far below the cut score may be ignored
  ● Disadvantaged students will be more likely to drop-out of school

❖ Accountability
  ● Schools with large numbers of minority students
    Special Ed and ELL students will be labeled as “Failing”
Not all standards-based accountability policies are created equal
Reducing the incentive to focus on students at the cut score

Use of index score gives weight to students at all levels of the learning continuum

Washington’s old system:
% L1(1) + % L2(2) + % L3(3) + % L4(4)

Example:
.25(1) + .25(2) + .25(3) + .25(4) = 2.5
.20(1) + .20(2) + .30(3) + .30(4) = 2.7
How should we define “failing”

- The NCLB minimums are much higher than the minimums used in Texas (Kane, Thomas, & Staiger)
  - In Texas only 2% of schools are labeled “Academically Unacceptable”
How should we define “failing”

In Texas, schools with sustained poor performance faced the possibility of state takeover (Grissmer & Flanagan)

NCLB has prescriptive list of consequences:

- Years 1 & 2 - Pay for transportation to attend higher achieving school
- Year 3 - Vouchers for supplemental services
- Year 4 - Corrective action such as new curriculum
- Year 5 - Restructuring of schools
Rewards and Recognition (Clotfelter & Ladd)

 Rewards signify values…

  - What will be measured?
  - Should adjustments be made for socioeconomic factors?
  - What will the rewards be?
  - Who should get the rewards?

 NCLB is heavy on the sanctions and light on the rewards
Absolute Standard vs. Growth

Setting absolute targets for sub-groups creates high failure rates (Kane, Thomas, & Staiger)

100% of students meeting standard may seem unrealistic to educators (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner)

- Could create a sense of helplessness
Absolute Standard vs. Growth

Create goals based on growth of sub-groups (Kane, Thomas, & Staiger)
- Levels playing field
- Imprecision of test scores and sampling

Washington’s old system:
- Reduce Percent of Non-Proficient 10% over 3 years
  50% NP = 5% increase (50% to 55% proficient)
  10% NP = 1% increase (90% to 91% proficient)
The Role of Business in Texas and North Carolina

- Business community was instrumental in reform efforts (Grissmer & Flanagan)
  - Pushed for legislation
  - Worked with education community
- This support was advantageous for states
Variations in Standards and Accountability Policies

- Using index scores requires attention for all students
- Strict definitions of “failure” will lead consequences for more schools
- Definitions of success defines the goal
- Absolute standards vs. growth
- Support for implementation
Fundamental Flaws of No Child Left Behind
Gaming the System

Goldhaber:
- Exempting low achieving students from testing
- Changing the make-up of the school
- Adjusting the standards

Shifting Title I funding
- Sanctions only apply to schools that receive Title I funding
NCLB calls for “scientifically based research” 111 times (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner)

So where is the research behind NCLB?
- Case studies with potential selection bias
- Site 8 features of the reform efforts in Texas and North Carolina (Grissmer & Flanagan)
Significant Features of Reform in Texas and North Carolina (Grissmer & Flanagan)

- Establish clear teaching objectives by grade through state-wide learning standards
- Implement new state-wide assessments closely linked to the learning standards
- Emphasize strongly that all students are expected to meet the standards
- Establish a system of feedback that can be used for diagnostic purposes
Significant Features of Reform in Texas and North Carolina (Grissmer & Flanagan)

- Establish a system of accountability with both sanctions and rewards linked the assessment results
  - NCLB clearly outlines the consequences of failing to make AYP, but there are no explicit rewards
Significant Features of Reform in Texas and North Carolina
(Grissmer & Flanagan)

- Deregulate the teaching and schooling environment and giving teachers and administrators more local control and increased flexibility in determining how to meet standards
  - How can you give more local control by passing a federal law?
  - The power to deregulate lies with the states more than the federal government
Significant Features of Reform in Texas and North Carolina (Grissmer & Flanagan)

- Sustaining the system of assessment and accountability without significant changes over several years
  - Many states already had developed assessment systems in accordance with the 1994 reauthorization, so NCLB undermined the efforts of many of the states
    - Washington - high standards, measured growth rather than absolute scores, index scores measured progress of students at all levels not just those around the cut score
Significant Features of Reform in Texas and North Carolina (Grissmer & Flanagan)

Explicit shifting of resources to schools with more disadvantaged students

- Districts with at least 1 school in school improvement must put Title I money aside to provide transportation for students to attend other schools
- After 3 years of school improvement, districts must use funding to offer students supplemental services
Fundamental Flaws in NCLB

❖ High stakes will lead to “creative” ways of beating the system
❖ Research does not lend much support for this policy
  • Very heavy handed
  • Flexibility and Local control?
  • Undermines progress made by the states
  • Takes resources away from schools that need it the most